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SUBJECT: DPP Candidate Chen Chu Sits Out First Kaohsiung City
Mayoral Debate

REF: 2005 TAIPEI 3856

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. The TVBS TV Station hosted the first televised Kaohsiung mayoral election debate on November 5. Although all three major mayoral candidates were invited, only the Kuomintang (KMT) candidate Huang Chun-ying and the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) candidate Lo Chih-ming attended, debating major issues such as corruption, unemployment and the economy. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate Chen Chu declined to participate because of lack of time to prepare and concerns about the pro-Blue stance of TVBS. According to recent media polling, only Huang Chun-ying and Chen Chu have realistic chances of winning the December 9 election, with Lo Chih-ming polling at low single digits.
End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chen Chu's assistant told AIT/K that Chen Chu did not have enough preparation time due to the short notice given by TVBS and that she was also concerned about the pro-blue stance of TVBS. Chen's assistant noted that KMT candidate Huang Chun-ying had declined an invitation to a debate from pro-green Formosa TV, causing that debate to be cancelled. Kaohsiung's KMT Chairman Hsu Fu-ming had said in an earlier conversation with AIT/K that previous interviews with Huang Chun-ying had been edited for negative sound bytes by Formosa TV, causing Huang to be especially wary of the debate proposed by that television station.

Main Issues - Unemployment, Economy, cleanliness in politics and age

¶3. (U) During this debate, the KMT Candidate Huang Chun-ying and the TSU candidate Lo Chih-ming both emphasized unemployment as a

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critical issue in Kaohsiung and they concurred that boosting Kaohsiung's economy was essential. Huang argued that "direct-links with China" under conditions of national safety and sovereignty, could positively boost the economy, while Lo advocated developing hi-tech industries as the solution.

¶4. (U) Both candidates emphasized their own integrity and untainted careers, and both said they were committed to continue the investigation into the Kaohsiung Rapid Transit Corporation (KRTC) scandal (reftel). Lo, however, reminded people of previous and on-going corruption scandals involving both the KMT and the DPP. He argued that a clean TSU candidate should be the best choice for mayor in the upcoming election.

¶5. (U) Age was another issue in the debate as Huang is 65 and Lo is 49. Lo argued that his younger age would make him more energetic in performing his duties, just like former U.S. President Clinton. Huang stressed that he was still full of energy, and maintained that being a mayor was like conducting an orchestra, putting the right people in right place, at the right time.

Conclusion - Time for a change

¶6. (U) Both Huang and Lo emphasized that changing government through the democratic process was legitimate and necessary. Huang asserted that the DPP lacked administrative ability and that its links to corruption in the KRTC scandal had hampered the city's development. Lo, on the other hand, urged people to vote for him to avoid a continuing power struggle between the Green and Blue camps, and to reduce possible linkages between the outcome of this mayoral election and the upcoming legislature and presidential elections.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) Fearing a possible split in the Green camp, AIT/K contacts have told post that TSU's Lo has been under heavy pressure by pro-independence social groups, like the Southern Taiwan Association, to withdraw from the race. However, Lo clearly stated in this debate that he will not drop out from the race for any reason. In this first televised debate, Lo impressed people with his eloquence as well as with his tough and firm image. Although the debate can hardly increase Lo's popularity enough to win him the election, it could draw votes away from the DPP's Chen Chu. During the debate, the KMT candidate, as usual, showed his gentle and mild personality. KMT Kaohsiung City Chairman Hsu has told AIT/K that he noticed the drawbacks of Huang's soft image in campaign events and

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planned to hire a public relations consultant to improve his image and enhance his campaign.

Note: Next Debate on November 19

¶8. (U) The three major candidates will meet in the next televised debate scheduled for November 19, which will be sponsored jointly by the Public Television Services and four print media (i.e. China Times, United Daily News, Liberty Time and Apple Daily).

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